



THE ABBEY THEATRE  
AND THE LYRIC THEATRE

# THE SHADOW OF A GUNMAN

SEAN O'CASEY



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# CHARAC- TERS

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# CHARACTER LIST

**Donal Davoren,** *'Oh, Donal Og O'Davoren, your way's a thorny way. Your last state is worse than your first. Ah me, alas! Pain, pain ever, for ever.'*

A thirty-year-old aspiring poet, Davoren spends his days in his tenement room attempting to write poetry as part of his quest to seek the beauty in life. A romantic, he is relatively indifferent to the nationalist cause, but plays along when some of the residents suspect he has an affiliation with the IRA because he enjoys the attention, particularly from Minnie Powell. A coward at heart, he lacks the courage of his artistic convictions.

**Seumas Shields,** *'I'm a Nationalist right enough; I believe in the freedom of Ireland, an' that England has no right to be here, but I draw the line when I hear the gunmen blowin' about dyin' for the people, when it's the people that are dyin' for the gunmen! With all due respect to the gunmen, I don't want them to die for me.'*

A thirty-five-year-old peddler and pessimist who shares the room in the tenement with Davoren, Shields is a lazy man with a healthy sense of self-preservation. He firmly believes himself to be a pious man and a patriot, but he is disillusioned with the nationalist cause that he nominally supports.

**Tommy Owens,** *'Mr. Davoren, I'd die for Ireland!...I never got a chance---they never gave me a chance---but all the same I'd be there if I was called on---.'*

Another resident of the tenement, Tommy Owens is a twenty-five-year-old melodeon player who is desperate both to prove himself as a loyal supporter of the Republican effort and to impress Minnie Powell.

**Adolphus Grigson,** *'What do I care for anybody in the house? Are they keepin' me; are they givin' me anything? When they're keepin' Grigson it'll be time enough for them to talk. I can tell them Adolphus Grigson wasn't born in a bottle!'*

A bumptious alcoholic who resides in the tenement with his long-suffering wife, Grigson is a self-proclaimed 'Orangeman' (an avowed Protestant), right down to his Bible and his picture of King William triumphant at the Battle of the Boyne hanging on the wall.

**Mrs. Grigson,** *'I'm always in dread that some night or another, when he has a sup taken, he'll fall down the kitchen stairs an' break his neck. Not that I'd be any the worse if anything did happen to him, for you know the sort he is, Mr. Shields; sure he has me heart broke.'*

Adolphus Grigson's wife, an anxious and unhappy woman, hopelessly downtrodden by her husband's alcoholism and selfishness.

**Minnie Powell,** *'An' do you think Minnie Powell cares whether they'll talk or no? She's had to push her way through life up to this without help from any one, an' she's not goin' to ask their leave, now, to do what she wants to do.'*

A young woman of twenty-three who is, by necessity, self-sufficient owing to the early death of her parents. Fond of dresses and dances, Powell is attracted to Davoren by virtue of his supposed IRA connections. Although she is derided by many other characters of the play as shallow, Powell ultimately is the only resident of the tenement willing to sacrifice herself in the name of love and nationalism.

**Mr. Mulligan,** *'What am I better? It was the sorry day I ever let you come into this house. Maybe them notices to quit will stop your writin' letters to the papers about me an' me house.'*

The landlord of the tenement. A self-important man who is irked by Shields' lack of respect for him.





*The Shadow of a Gunman*

**Mr. Maguire,** *'Can't be did, can't be did, Seumas; if I waited till to-morrow all the butterflies might be dead. I'll leave this bag here till this evening.'*

A young IRA volunteer and co-worker to Seumas.

**Mrs. Henderson,** *'Mr. Davoren won't mind; it's him as can put you in the way o' havin' your wrongs righted; come on in, man, an' don't be so shy---Mr. Davoren is wan ov ourselves that stands for govermint ov the people with the people by the people. You'll find you'll be as welcome as the flowers in May.'*

A warm-hearted and talkative resident of a neighboring tenement and a champion of Mr Gallogher's plea.

**Mr. Gallogher,** *'Mr. Davoren, sir, on behalf ov meself, James Gallicker, an' Winifred, Mrs. Gallicker, wife ov the said James, I beg to offer, extend an' furnish our humble an' hearty thanks for your benevolent goodness in interferin' in the matter specified, particularated an' expanded upon in the letter, mandamus or schedule, as the case may be. An' let me interpretate to you on behalf ov meself an' Winifred Gallicker, that whenever you visit us you will be supernally positive ov a hundred thousand welcomes---ahem.'*

A nervous but upright man, Mr Gallogher is resident of a neighboring tenement seeking the Republican court's help.

**An Auxiliary,** *'Ow, you're a selt, one of the seltic race that speaks a lingo of its ahn, and that's going to overthrow the British Empire---I don't think!'*

A soldier of the Auxiliary Division, a paramilitary unit of the Royal Irish Constabulary set up in July 1920 made up of former British officers. The role of the Auxiliaries was to conduct counter-insurgency operations against the Irish Republican Army. The Auxiliaries became infamous for their reprisals on civilians and civilian property in revenge for IRA activities. They worked alongside and were strongly associated with the notorious Black and Tans.



# SYNOPSIS

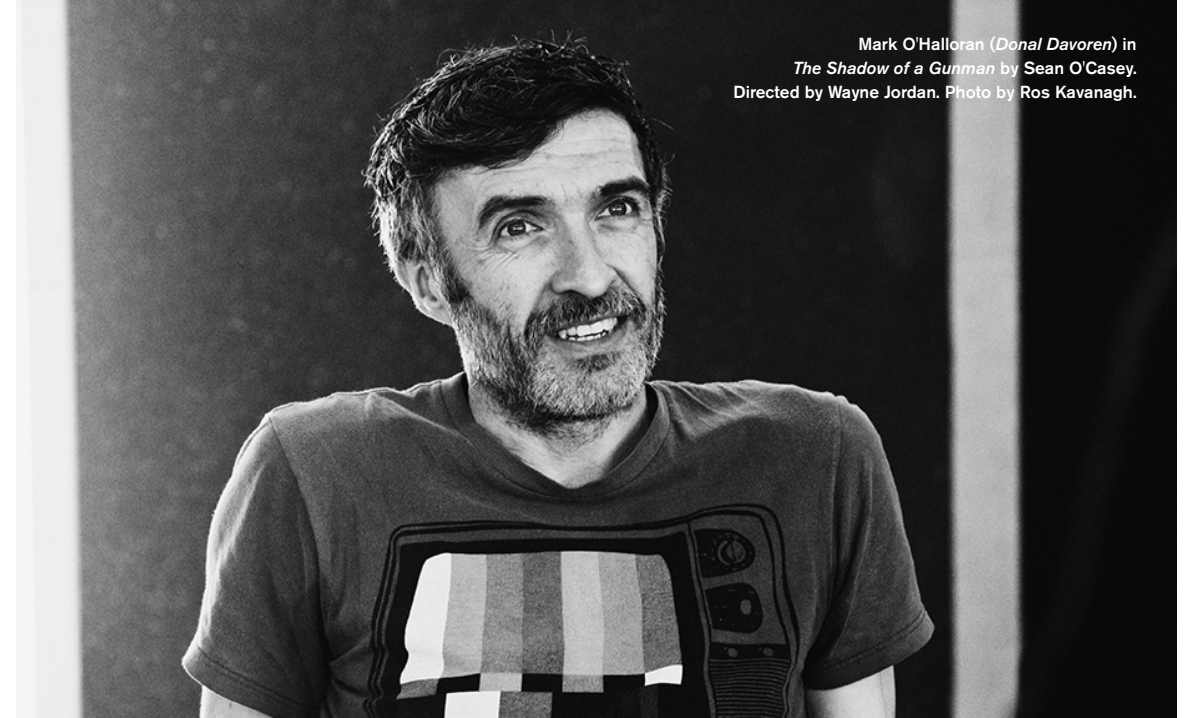
# ACT ONE

**The action all takes place in the small untidy room shared by Donal Davoren and Seumas Shields in a tenement in Hilljoy Square, Dublin. The period of the play is May 1920.**

The play opens with Donal Davoren feverishly typing up his heartfelt attempts at poetry whilst Seumas Shields dozes on the stretcher bed in the room they share. Shields complains bitterly when he realizes he has slept in because his friend Mr. Maguire has failed to arrive and wake him at nine o'clock as promised. As Shields pulls together the bric-a-brac he plans to sell that day and Davoren despairs of ever being allowed to compose his poetry in peace, Maguire dashes in and informs the irritated Shields that he will not be able to work with him that day because he has to travel to Knocksedan. Maguire then thrusts a mysterious bag into a corner of the room and dashes out again.

The next knock on the door signals the unwelcome arrival of Mr. Mulligan, the landlord of the tenement. Shields and Mulligan argue, and Mulligan informs Shields that they are to be evicted for consistent failure to pay their rent, although he is careful to be civil to Davoren. After the irate landlord exits, Shields reveals that the reason Mulligan was so polite to Davoren is because the entire building suspects him to be an IRA man on the run. Davoren is astonished by this misconception, but shrugs it off and settles back to work after Shields leaves.

Another knock on the door irks Davoren, but his annoyance quickly fades when it is revealed to be Minnie Powell, an attractive neighbour who clearly has an eye for Davoren. She winsomely asks to borrow a drop of milk, and the two enjoy a flirtation. Powell whispers that she knows Davoren to be a gunman on the run, and Davoren, enjoying the attention, does not disillusion her and merely responds, 'Maybe I am, and maybe I'm not.' Just as they are about to kiss, they are interrupted by the arrival of Tommy Owens, a twenty-five-year-old nervy neighbor with a few drinks on him. To the intense irritation of the two would-be romancers, Owens persists in trying to ingratiate himself with Davoren as a fervent patriot.



Mark O'Halloran (Donal Davoren) in  
*The Shadow of a Gunman* by Sean O'Casey.  
Directed by Wayne Jordan. Photo by Ros Kavanagh.

As Owens grows increasingly passionate in his orations on the subject of nationalism, two more uninvited guests enter in the form of Mrs. Henderson and Mr. Gallogher. Mr. Gallogher, after much well-intentioned prodding from the redoubtable Mrs. Henderson, nervously reveals his reason for intruding; he is being subjected to endless abuse from his neighbours, and he is hoping that Davoren will take up his case with the Republic court. After the increasingly bemused Davoren listens to a nervous but heartfelt reading of Gallogher's letter of appeal (with numerous interjections from Henderson), the group are interrupted by the sound of 'stop press' outside the window; the startling news filters in that there has been an ambush in Knocksedan and Maguire (Shields' erstwhile friend) has been killed. Shaken by the news, Davoren finally manages to usher Owens, Henderson, and Gallogher out of his room. Mr. Gallogher diffidently leaves his letter for the IRA council with Davoren, who hurriedly assures him that he will deliver it.

The hopeful Davoren is thwarted in his attempts to resume a romantic interlude with Powell because she has to dash back to work. However, before she exits, she gets Davoren to type both their names on a piece of paper, promises to return that evening, steals a kiss and leaves. Davoren is left to muse, 'Minnie, Donal; Donal, Minnie. Very pretty, but very ignorant. A gunman on the run! Be careful, be careful, Donal Davoren. But Minnie is attracted to the idea, and I am attracted to Minnie. And what danger can there be in being the shadow of a gunman?'



# ACT TWO

It is now night in Davoren's and Shields' room, as Davoren continues to agonise over his attempts at poetry. Shields muses on the death of Maguire, and tries to persuade Davoren that poetry is only worthwhile if it can incite the common people to revolutionary action. Davoren's angry riposte is interrupted when Shields, suddenly frightened, hears a tapping noise that he takes as a dangerous omen. Davoren, unable to hear any tapping, irritably extinguishes his candle and tries to sleep. Shields attempts to warn Davoren against courting scandal by being seen with Minnie Powell, and Davoren defends her. Shields sagely summarises Powell as flighty, saying 'I wouldn't care to have me life dependin' on brave little Minnie Powell--she wouldn't sacrifice a jazz dance to save it.' Shields goes on to muse that he is disillusioned by the nationalist cause, feeling uneasy with the sacrifices being made by ordinary citizens.

Both men jump when they hear a shot in the alley outside. Shields wonders aloud about the mysterious noises he has heard from the stables at the back of the building; Davoren is horrified at Shields' theory that there may be a secret bomb factory concealed there.

A timid knock at the door announces Mrs. Grigson, another neighbor. A diffident and down-trodden creature, she has come to beg the help of Shields to find her husband. She is worried that he may have been taken by the Black and Tans; Shields (much more accurately) assures her that her husband is probably just drunk. A drunken Mr. Grigson arrives and makes an unwelcome entrance into Davoren's and Shields' room, where he truculently asserts his own self-importance, denigrates his long-suffering wife, and attempts to ingratiate himself to the fuming Davoren.

Mr. Grigson is loudly singing 'The Orange Lily O' (a traditional Orange Order song) when the ominous sound of a motorcar can be heard. All the residents still (even Mr. Grigson), fearing that it may be the dreaded Royal Irish Constabulary forces about to make one of their notoriously violent raids on the tenement building. Davoren frantically searches for the letter to the Republic court that Mr. Gallogher left with him, knowing that it could fatally incriminate him. The Grigsons make their exit back to their own rooms, as Shields and Davoren search for the letter.

Malcolm Adams (*Mr. Gallogher*) and Catherine Walsh (*Mrs. Henderson*) in *The Shadow of a Gunman* by Sean O'Casey.  
Directed by Wayne Jordan. Photo by Ros Kavanagh.







Davoren's relief at finding the letter is quickly shattered when he and Shields realize to their horror that the bag that Maguire had deposited with them before he left on his fatal errand is in fact full of bombs. Powell dashes in, frightened but also excited by the drama of the raid. As they hear the unmistakable sounds of the RIC breaking down the door, Shields and Davoren are paralysed by indecision, but Powell keeps her wits about her. She grabs the bag and promises to hide it in her room, reasoning that the RIC probably wouldn't hurt a girl. Davoren is so panicked he barely notices her leave with the bag.

An Auxillary barges into the room, and threatens the terrified Shields and Davoren whilst ransacking their room. Mrs. Grigson enters in a panic, revealing that the RIC are bullying her husband and drinking all his liquor. The Auxillary perks up at the mention of liquor, and hurries out to join his fellow officers. The two men worry about the possibility of Minnie Powell's room being searched.

To their horror, they hear the unmistakable sound of Powell being dragged away, shouting bravely, but a little hysterically, 'Up the Republic!' Shields and Davoren feverishly express their hope that she wouldn't reveal their part in the affair. Mrs. Grigson runs out to check, and dashes back in to report that the RIC discovered bombs in Powell's room, and that Mrs. Henderson has been arrested for fighting with the soldiers. Mrs. Grigson is scornful towards Minnie Powell, and fervently worries for her husband. Mr. Grigson enters, clearly shaken but attempting to maintain some of his usual swagger, and dismisses his wife superciliously.

A vast explosion is heard from outside, followed by rapid machine-gun fire. Grigson dashes out for the relative safety of the kitchen. To the dawning horror of Shields and Davoren, voices can be heard outside saying 'Who was it was killed?' 'Minnie Powell'; 'She went to jump off the lorry an' she was shot'; 'They say she's dead--- shot through the buzzom!' Mrs. Grigson rushes in and confirms that Minnie is dead, and that a piece of paper with her name and one other on it was found in her breast-pocket, but that it is too soaked in blood for the second name to be read. Davoren is devastated by the guilt of what he has caused, and Seumas solemnly says, 'I knew something ud come of the tappin' on the wall!'



# ABOUT THE PLAY- WRIGHT

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# SEAN O'CASEY

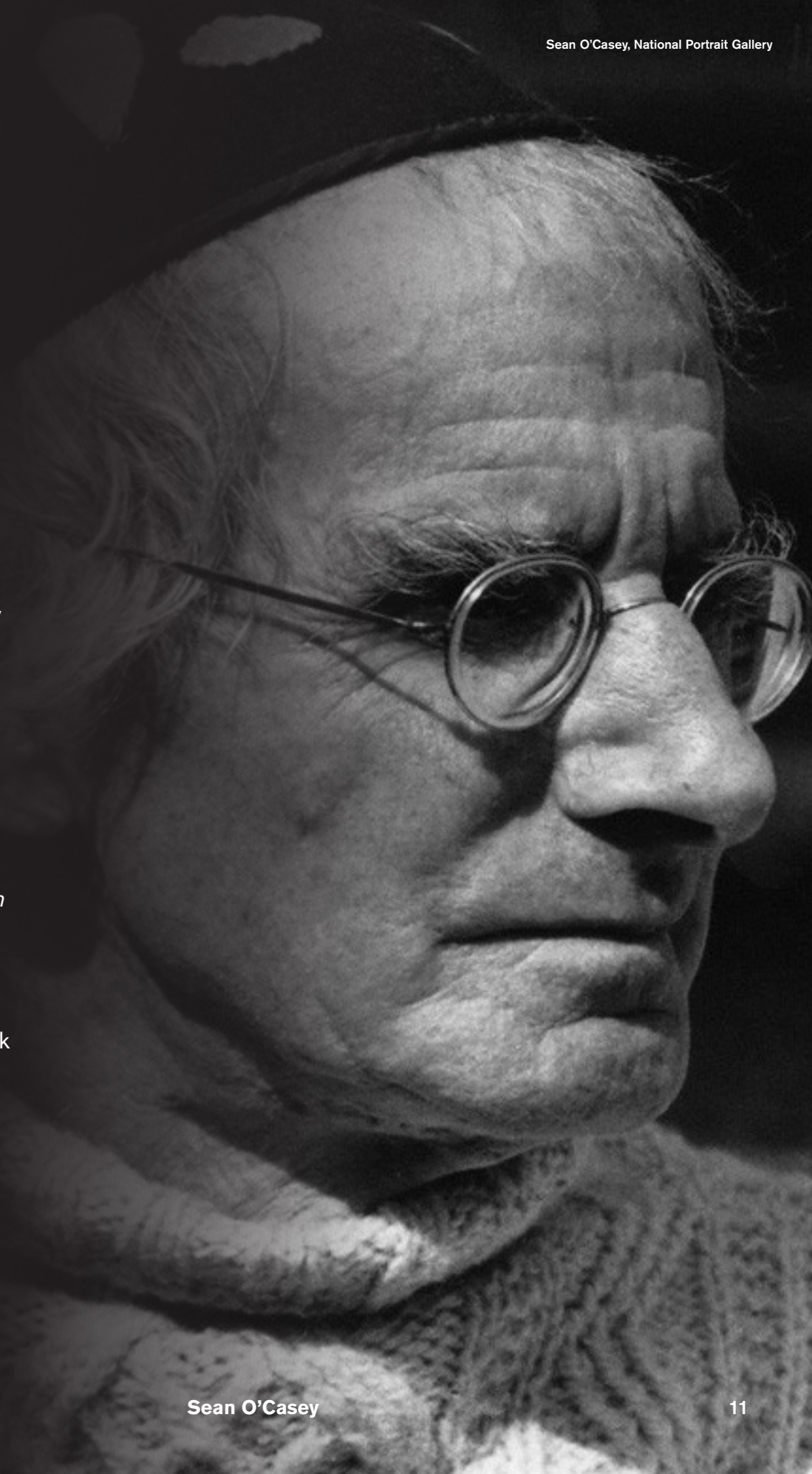
Sean O'Casey was born John Casey on March 30, 1880, in Dublin to a lower middle-class Irish Protestant family. Following the death of his father when O'Casey was only six, the family became increasingly impoverished, which ultimately led to O'Casey leaving school in order to earn a living for his family at 14. There followed several years of hard manual labour, including a stint with the Irish railways. Despite only having three years of formal schooling, O'Casey was an avid reader and sought to educate himself through books.

O'Casey found himself ignited to patriotic fervor by the cause of Irish nationalism, changing his name to its Irish form and devoting himself to learning the Irish language. He was profoundly affected by the poverty and squalor he was witness to in the slums of Dublin, and this combined with nationalism would become the prevailing themes of his writing. He joined the Irish Citizen Army in 1914, a paramilitary arm of the Irish labour unions, and helped draft its constitution. However, O'Casey was to become disillusioned by the Irish nationalist movement because its leaders prioritized nationalist ideals ahead of socialist ones. Resultantly, O'Casey did not participate in the 1916 Easter Rising.

O'Casey turned his energies to drama, writing plays that reflected his ambiguous feelings towards his fellow Irish citizens, the poverty of Dublin, and the dangerous romance of the nationalist cause. He endured several rejections before the Abbey Theatre finally produced *The Shadow of a Gunman* in 1923, followed by *Juno and the Paycock* in 1924, and *The Plough and the Stars* in 1926.

In 1926, partially motivated by the Abbey Theatre's rejection of his play, *The Silver Tassie*, O'Casey moved to England, where he met and married the Irish actress Eileen Carey Reynolds. His later work veered away from the tragicomedies set in Dublin slums, and encompassed such diverse genres as Expressionism (*Within the Gates*, 1934), fantasy and ritual (*Cock-a-Doodle Dandy*, 1949; *The Bishop's Bonfire*, 1955; *The Drums of Father Ned*, 1958) and satire (*Behind the Green Curtains*, 1961). O'Casey died in Torquay of a heart attack in 1964, aged 84.

'The artist's life,' he once advised, 'is to be where life is, active life, found in neither ivory tower nor concrete shelter; he must be out listening to everything, looking at everything, and thinking it all out afterward.'



# THE IRISH WAR OF INDEPENDENCE—



# THE IRISH WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

The action of *The Shadow of a Gunman* takes place in May of 1920; this was a particularly eventful year during the Irish War of Independence, during which IRA guerilla warfare and reprisals by the Black and Tans and Auxiliaries meant that Ireland was constantly embroiled in fear, violence, and paranoia.

During May 1920, the ongoing struggle between the British Empire and Sinn Féin was to reach boiling point. By the end of 1919, Sinn Féin and Dáil Éireann were declared illegal. British Prime Minister Lloyd George devised the 'Bill for the Better Government of Ireland,' which would recommend separate parliaments for the six northern counties and for the other twenty-six counties of Ireland. This bill was to greatly intensify tensions between Sinn Féin and the British Executive in Ireland. Following the fatal shooting of a policeman in Dublin on February 20th, 1920, a curfew was imposed on the city, making it illegal for any persons other than members of the British forces to be found on the streets between midnight and 5 a.m. Soon afterwards the curfew period was extended and began at 8 p.m.

On March 24th, the first detachments of a special police force recruited from British ex-servicemen arrived on Irish streets. These troops wore khaki coats with black trousers and black caps and were sardonically christened 'the Black and Tans,' and they quickly earned a grim reputation for violence and bullying of Irish citizens. In order to retaliate against these powerful reinforcements, the Irish Republican Army split into small groups of fifteen to thirty men who used guerilla tactics to keep their enemies constantly spread thin. Many of these IRA soldiers lived perennially on the lam moving continuously from place to place and seldom remaining in one location. By May, 1920, the British forces were being gradually pushed back to their headquarters in Dublin.



# 1920

<i>21 January:</i>	Assistant Commissioner Redmond, DMP, shot dead in Dublin.	<i>20 September:</i>	Shootings and reprisals at Balbriggan.
<i>25 February:</i>	Government of Ireland Bill introduced into House of Commons.	<i>14 October:</i>	Shooting dead of Seán Treacy.
<i>19 March:</i>	Tomás MacCurtain, Lord Mayor of Dublin, shot dead.	<i>25 October:</i>	Death of Terence MacSwiney on hunger strike.
<i>26 March:</i>	Alan Bell, RM, shot dead by IRA.	<i>01 November:</i>	Execution of Kevin Barry.
<i>03 April:</i>	IRA burning and destruction of income tax offices and evacuated Royal Irish Constabulary barracks.	<i>12 November:</i>	Arthur Griffith calls off remaining hunger strikes.
<i>12 April:</i>	General Strike called in support of hunger strikers in Mountjoy.	<i>21 November:</i>	Bloody Sunday.
<i>14 April:</i>	Release of political prisoners from Mountjoy.	<i>26 November:</i>	Arrest of Arthur Griffith, Eoin MacNeill and Eamon Duggan.
<i>20/24 June:</i>	Riots in Derry City.	<i>10 December:</i>	Proclamation of Martial Law in Cork, Kerry, Limerick and Tipperary.
<i>21 July:</i>	Attack on Catholic shipyard workers in Belfast.	<i>11 December:</i>	Cork City burnings by Auxiliaries, Black and Tans, and British soldiers.
<i>9 August:</i>	Restoration of Order in Ireland Bill receives Royal Assent.	<i>23 December:</i>	Government of Ireland Bill enacted.
<i>22 August:</i>	Shooting dead of D/I Swanzy in Lisburn.	<i>24 December:</i>	De Valera returns to Dublin.
<i>25/30 August:</i>	Riots in Belfast.	<i>29 December:</i>	First official reprisal attacks at Midleton, Cork.



# HOUSE RAIDS

IN 1920s DUBLIN

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# HOUSE RAIDS IN 1920s DUBLIN

David Ganly (Seumas Shields) in *The Shadow of a Gunman* by Sean O'Casey.  
Directed by Wayne Jordan. Photo by Ros Kavanagh.



*The Shadow of a Gunman*

In *The Shadow of a Gunman*, the residents of the tenement house on Hilljoy Square are subject to a brutal home invasion by Auxiliaries. This type of scene was sadly familiar to Irish (and particularly Dublin) citizens during this period. Historian Dorothy Macardle describes life in the capital city in June and July of 1920:

*'Dublin during the summer was a scene of intense military activity. The streets were full of British Regulars in khaki and steel helmets who carried rifles with bayonets fixed, as well as the Dublin Metropolitan Police, while at every point of vantage lingered men in plain clothes, more or less recognisable as detectives of the G Division employed in political espionage. Military cordons drawn around sections of the city with barbed wire, military lorries and tanks in attendance were a familiar sight. At night searchlights played on the house fronts, while the rumble of lorries shook the streets. The stopping of a lorry outside a house was the signal to the occupants hastily to throw on garments and rush to open the door, in the hope of being in time to prevent its being broken in. Then followed the rush of armed men upstairs and into every room, attic and cellar, swinging revolvers and shouting threats, the bursting open of cupboards, tearing up of floor boards and ripping of mattresses. If, as frequently happened, the raiders were drunk, or in a savage temper as the result of a recent ambush, shots would be fired through the walls and ceilings and breakables smashed. Any man found on the premises was in danger of being shot out of hand. Those taken away in lorries were sometimes shot dead and reported as 'shot whilst attempting to escape.' Articles looted from the raided houses were carried openly through the streets.*

**Dorothy Macardle, *The Irish Republic* (London: Corgi Books, 1968), p. 281, 243**



# TENEMENT LIFE

# TENEMENT LIFE

**The action of *The Shadow of a Gunman* all takes place within the single room shared by *Davoren* and *Shields* in a tenement building in Dublin.**

In the early twentieth century, working class people in Dublin often lived in overcrowded, squalid conditions. Ironically, many of Dublin's poorest and most over-crowded dwellings were originally luxurious town houses that were built to accommodate one upper-class family in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, when the upper classes moved out, the houses were taken over by landlords who rented them out room by room to poor families, and the houses quickly fell into disrepair and squalor. Over 20,000 families lived in one-room dwellings. Poor hygiene and over-crowding was the norm and many tenements filled with multiple families were forced to share a single lavatory in a yard.

This horrendous overcrowding meant that disease and infection were rife, malnutrition was common, and the death

rate in Dublin was extremely high (27.6 per 1000), particularly amongst infants. In 1913, Sir Charles Cameron, the Medical Inspector for Dublin, had reported: 'It is certain that infants perish from want of sufficient food'. About 20% of all who died in the city (1,808 in 1911) were children less than a year old and nearly all those occurred among the poorest classes. Overall, the death rate in Dublin in 1911 per thousand people was 22.3. In London it was 15.6.

On Tuesday, 2 September 1913, two houses in Church Street suddenly collapsed, burying the occupants. The sixteen rooms of the houses were occupied by about ten families; a total of over forty people. Seven were killed in this disaster and many more were badly injured. After this disaster, a Committee of Inquiry was set up by the

Government to study housing in the city. The committee reported: There are many tenement houses with seven or eight rooms that house a family in each room and contain a population of between forty and fifty souls...The entrance to all tenement houses is by a common door off a street, lane or alley, and in most cases the door is never shut day or night...Generally the only water supply of the house is furnished by a single water tap which is in the yard...Having visited a large number of these houses in all parts of the city, we have no hesitation in saying that it is no uncommon thing to find halls and landings, yards and closets of the houses in a filthy condition, and in nearly every case human excreta is to be found scattered about the yards and in the floors of the closets and in some cases even in the passages of the house itself.

Seán O'Casey recalled his life in the tenements and described a similar scene:

*'Then, where we lived, with thousands of others, the garbage of ashpit with the filth from the jakes was tumbled into big wicker baskets that were carried on the backs of men whose clothing had been soaked in the filth from a hundred homes; carried out from the tiny back yards, through the kitchen living-room, out by the hall, dumped in a horrid heap on the street outside ...'*

*Read more details and view images from the National Archives about Dublin tenement life. [http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/exhibition/dublin/poverty\\_health.html](http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/exhibition/dublin/poverty_health.html)*



# INTERVIEW

## WITH THE DIRECTOR

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# INTERVIEW: WAYNE JORDON

*What about O'Casey's style appeals to you as a director?*

Even though we associate O'Casey with the Abbey, that style of theatre wasn't originally his background. As a theatregoer, O'Casey was dedicated to popular forms, vaudeville musicals, melodramas like *The Corsican Brothers*. With *Shadow*, I feel like O'Casey was dismantling notions of romance and patriotism by using popular forms like vaudeville. I was attracted to the same things when I started as a director. Popular forms rather than high art forms, things like pantomime were the reason I began. I think those kinds of formal, structural interests are incredibly recognisable and engaging. They can be searing, astute, dynamic, mind-blowing; people just have to be open to them.

*Stylistically, how do you think O'Casey's interest in popular entertainment affects *Shadow*?*

I think the reason why O'Casey and this play are pooh-poohed is because people can't understand them and dismiss them as overly simple. But *Shadow* is actually incredibly complex. Structurally, it's a series of 'turns' – vaudevillian turns [short performances such as slapstick

turns, song-and-dance routines, and variety acts]. A man is in a room, people come in and make jokes, and it all ends very badly. Finding this tone and this idiom was very important in *Shadow*. For this, the way in which the scenes are structured and how the lines land is very much about their rhythm and physicality. I think there is no fourth wall, and the whole play is completely delivered directly to you, the audience.

*O'Casey was writing at a time of great turbulence in Ireland; how do you see this reflected in *Shadow*?*

I think the whole play is absolutely a parody of romance: sexual romance, the romance of nationalism, and romantic poetry. O'Casey exposes the hollowness at the core of romantic notions through jokes and stripping off layers. Nationalism had become a mass movement, and a popular movement. Romantic nationalism is the easiest thing for people to graft onto themselves because it is so notional. It's an idea of Ireland that's about myth, poetry, song, race (the most dangerous bit); all of those things are utterly morphic and can be changed. O'Casey was a prophet, he saw what was about to happen with the nationalist revolution, and he was terrified about how it would steamroll over pluralism

and diversity. The romantic national ideology was also responsible for wiping out the diverse history of living in Ireland before people became 'Irish'. When something becomes so massively popular, diversity becomes reduced. And that's a dangerous time; when change has to happen in a place, sometimes people have to sacrifice their individuality.

You can see it in Minnie and Tommy's romanticization of Donal as an imagined revolutionary hero. Minnie in particular conflates her ideas of romantic Ireland and romantic interest. Even Donal himself gets those things mixed up, because he sees the way she looks at him and he enjoys the reflection of himself ennobled by revolutionary ardour.



*How did you go about imagining what the world of Shadow would look like onstage?*

My initial approach is to strip everything back, so there's only the play and the actors. I'm probably too aesthetically playful to really do nothing, but the beginning is stripping back, then looking at what can we keep in order to activate this play. I like kind of eccentric actors, so rehearsal is about giving full range to their personalities, and the confluence of their personalities in the characters.

Sarah Jane Shiels (lighting design), Sarah Bacon (set and costume design) and I went to see tenement buildings, and watched old films of the period, and really considered the era. But our design conversations were more about the theatre of how the play would

work, not the period. I think in terms of the look and feel of the tenement play, it can actually hinder the production to go too historically accurate; it just feels like a museum piece once the curtain comes up. We wanted something quite bare, and we knew it needed to have play in it. The world needed to look poor – stuck together and patched together. The aim was not to avoid the history but to really listen to the history. It's about looking at people like us making choices, even in a different situation and time.

*Finally, what do you think resonates most deeply between the world of Shadow and that of contemporary audiences?*

I really wanted to make a production that felt like Ireland mightn't happen; that the Ireland that these characters

are dreaming of might not happen, and that it might not be this Ireland. It's also a play about cowardice. If it's impossible to remain apolitical in a political situation, what does art mean in that situation? The revolutionary moment is a paradise in a way because of how full of possibility it is. Granted, that possibility is very rooted in the fact that things are broken down and the pain of change, but it's still this rich possibility that anything can happen. That's a way to look at now as well, but I don't think we're quite pushing the envelope enough yet.

# THEMES

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# THE SHADOW OF A GUNMAN: THEMES

## NATIONALISM

*The Shadow of a Gunman* takes place during the Irish War for Independence, and the characters express very different views on the ongoing fight of nationalism. For a number of the characters that inhabit the tenement and nearby buildings, their fascination with Donal Davoren as (so they think) a mysterious gunman on the run, prompts them to pour out their feelings of nationalist fervor to him.

Why do you think characters like Tommy Owens are so effusive and outspoken on this theme?

### Tommy Owens

*[Tearfully] Mr. Davoren, I'd die for Ireland!... I never got a chance---they never gave me a chance---but all the same I'd be there if I was called on---Mr. Shields knows that---ask Mr. Shields, Mr. Davoren....I'm bloody well tired o' waitin'---we're all tired o' waitin'. Why isn't every man in Ireland out with the I.R.A.? Up with the barricades, up with the barricades; it's now or never, now an' for ever, as Sarsfield said at the battle o' Vinegar Hill. Up with the barricades---that's Tommy Owens---*

But there is also a pragmatic side to these declarations of nationalism. For example, Mr. Gallogher, whilst proudly citing 'Faith and Fatherland', is hoping Davoren will intercede on his behalf to prompt the IRA to settle a dispute with his neighbours. The nationalist cause represents both a romanticized political struggle but also a powerful judiciary body in the citizens' lives.

Do you think that this kind of protestation of patriotism by Gallogher – which is also seeking a favour – is wholly sincere?

### Mr. Gallogher

*While leaving it entirely in the hands of the gentlemen of The Republican Army, the defendant, that is to say, James Gallogher of fifty-five St. Teresa Street, ventures to say that he thinks he has made out a Primmy Fashy Case against Mrs. Dwyer and all her heirs, male and female as aforesaid mentioned in the above written schedule.*

*[1] N.B. – If you send up any of your men, please tell them to bring their guns.*

*I beg to remain the humble servant and devoted admirer of the Gentlemen of the Irish Republican Army.*

However, Davoren and Shields – who in many ways serve as our guides through the play – have a very jaundiced view of nationalism. Davoren is more concerned with his poetic pursuits, and seems to only espouse nationalist ideals when it is personally advantageous (such as when he is trying to impress Minnie Powell). Shields has a much more cynical view of nationalism and views it as a dangerous movement, particularly for the average citizen.

Why do you think O'Casey has the two central characters offer such conflicted opinions on nationalism, particularly in a play written so shortly after Ireland's independence?

### Davoren

*I remember the time when you yourself believed in nothing but the gun.*

### Seumas

*Ay, when there wasn't a gun in the country; I've a different opinion now when there's nothin' but guns in the country. ... An' you daren't open your mouth, for Kathleen ní Houlihan is very different now to the woman who used to play the harp an' sing 'Weep on, weep on, your hour is past', for she's a ragin' devil now, an' if you only look crooked at her you're sure of a punch in th' eye. But this is the way I look at it---I look at it this way: You're not goin'-- -- you're not goin' to beat the British Empire---the British Empire, by shootin' an occasional Tommy at the corner of an occasional street. Besides, when the Tommies have the wind up-- --when the Tommies have the wind up they let bang at everything they see---they don't give a God's curse who they plug.*

## POETRY

Davoren is passionately devoted to his poetic calling, and the constant interruption of his writing by his neighbours barging into his room is a source of perpetual irritation to him (with perhaps an exception being made for Minnie Powell). He believes fervently that his is a noble calling, and expresses disgust with the more base concerns of his fellow man.

### Donal Davoren

*The People! Damn the people! They live in the abyss, the poet lives on the mountain-top; to the people there is no mystery of colour: it is simply the scarlet coat of the soldier; the purple vestments of a priest; the green banner of a party; the brown or blue overalls of industry. To them the might of design is a three-roomed house or a capacious bed. To them beauty is for sale in a butcher's shop. To the people the end of life is the life created for them; to the poet the end of life is the life that he creates for himself; life has a stifling grip upon the people's throat---it is the poet's musician. The poet ever strives to save the people; the people ever strive to destroy the poet. The people view life through creeds, through customs, and through necessities; the poet views creeds, customs, and necessities through life. The people ...*

Do you think Davoren is correct in his belief that the common people have no appreciation of poetry and/or beauty? Do you think that this is still the case today?

Davoren maintains that the only duty of a poet is the pursuit of beauty. The other characters do not seem to share or understand this belief, viewing poetry as a means to an end. Powell, whilst deeply admiring of Davoren's poetic endeavours (and trying to charm him into writing a poem about her), artlessly says, *'Poetry is a grand thing, Mr. Davoren, I'd love to be able to write a poem---a lovely poem on Ireland an' the men o' '98.'* For her, poetry is a means of supporting the nationalist cause...or immortalizing her own beauty.

Who do you think is right: Davoren, in his belief that poetry's only duty is to be beautiful; or Powell, who thinks that poetry should be used to commemorate important people and events?

Shields, on the other hand, thinks poetry is useless because it is unprofitable. Although he is willing to concede that it might be of use as a motivator for the common man: *'If I was you I'd give that game up; it doesn't pay a working-man to write poetry. I don't profess to*

*know much about poetry---I don't profess to know much about poetry---about poetry---I don't know much about the pearly glint of the morning dew, or the damask sweetness of the rare wild rose, or the subtle greenness of the serpent's eye---but I think a poet's claim to greatness depends upon his power to put passion in the common people.'*

Do you agree that poetry can be effective as a motivator of people and political passions?

Director Wayne Jordan commented, *'Donal Davoren is obviously a bad poet; he waxes eloquent about the common human but he can't see people. But I do think O'Casey actually has a great deal of sympathy for his character's endeavour of wanting to see the beauty in life.'* In fact, both of both of Davoren's poems in the play were actually poems previously written by O'Casey – 'A Walk in Eros' and the 'Celandine' poem is one he wrote for a woman that he was in love with named Máire Keating. Jordan noted, 'I think one has to assume that even though he includes these poems as an example of Donal's self-indulgence, at one point, O'Casey genuinely thought his poems were good. I think that in this kind of self-reference, O'Casey is engaging with his own understanding of himself as an artist.'

Why do you think O'Casey has a poet as his protagonist in *The Shadow of a Gunman*?

## IDENTITY

**The crux of *The Shadow of a Gunman* is a case of mistaken identity; Davoren's neighbours believe a (false) rumour that he is a gunman for the IRA hiding out from the pursuit of British soldiers. Davoren 'performs' this persona of a mysterious gunman when it suits him, enjoying the opportunity to bask in the admiration of others. However, he is not the only character whose identity is performed or misinterpreted.**

### Mr. Maguire

We only see Mr. Maguire very briefly onstage (although we hear Shields complain about him at length). When he does appear, he dashes in very quickly, cancels his plans with Shields, and deposits the bag in Shields' and Davoren's room. When pressed by the exasperated Shields as to where he is dashing off to, Maguire mysteriously answers, *'Business, business. I'm going out to catch butterflies.'* Maguire is quite an understated character, yet his militant actions powerfully affect the course of the play. Whilst Davoren is basking in the reflected glory of his status as a 'gunman', it is the quieter character Maguire who will ultimately become a martyr.



### Adolphus Grigson

A bumptious and unpleasant character, Mr. Grigson repeatedly asserts himself as a proud Orangeman. He insults his wife and makes swaggering statements about his own worth in order to seem more impressive. He belligerently asserts, 'Dolphus Grigson's afraid av nothin', creepin' or walkin',---if there's any one in the house thinks he's fit to take a fall out av Adolphus Grigson, he's here---a man; they'll find that Grigson's no soft thing.' Yet when the Auxiliaries attack the house, he is humiliated by them and revealed as a coward. He attempts to win back some of his braggadocio by denying his humiliation and dismissing his wife, but when the explosion happens outside, he flees in terror.

### Minnie Powell

Throughout the play, Minnie Powell fiercely asserts her independence, but is continually maligned by the other characters as feckless and flighty. Even the downtrodden Mrs. Grigson spitefully comments on Powell, '*With her fancy stockins, an' her pom-poms, an' her crêpe de chine blouses! I knew she'd come to no good!*' Shields in particular has no time for Powell's professed patriotism or romantic interest in Davoren, and savagely dismisses her:

### Shields

*A Helen of Troy come to live in a tenement! You think a lot about her simply because she thinks a lot about you, an' she thinks a lot about you because she looks upon you as a hero--a kind o' Paris ... she'd give the world an' all to be gaddin' about with a gunman. An' what ecstasy it ud give her if after a bit you were shot or hanged; she'd be able to go about then--like a good many more---singin', 'I do not mourn me darlin' lost, for he fell in his Jacket Green'. An' then, for a year an' a day, all round her hat she'd wear the Tri-coloured Ribbon O, till she'd pick up an' marry someone else---possibly a British Tommy with a Mons Star. An' as for bein' brave, it's easy to be that when you've no cause for cowardice; I wouldn't care to have me life dependin' on brave little Minnie Powell---she wouldn't sacrifice a jazz dance to save it.*

However, Shields is proved conclusively and tragically wrong; Minnie Powell does sacrifice her life to protect him and Davoren, because she mistakenly believes Davoren to be a patriot. Ultimately, the girl that is dismissed by all proves her mettle to be stronger than anybody else's.



# FURTHER RESOURCES



**Online exhibition about Dublin tenement life from the National Archives**

[http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/exhibition/dublin/poverty\\_health.html](http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/exhibition/dublin/poverty_health.html)

**Books**

D.M. Leeson, '*Black & Tans: British Police and Auxiliaries in the Irish War of Independence 1920-1921*' (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2011)

Kevin Corrigan Kearns, '*Dublin Tenement Life: An Oral History.*' (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2006)

**Articles**

Elizabeth Mannion, '*The Dublin Tenement Plays of the Early Abbey Theatre*' in *New Hibernia Review*, 2010, Vol.14(2), pp.69-83

William Armstrong, '*History, Autobiography, And The Shadow Of A Gunman*' in *Modern Drama* 1960 Vol. 2(4), pp. 417-424





*The Shadow of a Gunman*

## **Resource Pack 2015**

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*or visit —*

[www.abbeytheatre.ie/community-education](http://www.abbeytheatre.ie/community-education)

*Archival Photographs*

**Sean O'Casey** [http://www.npg.org.uk/  
collections/search/portraitLarge/mw07743/Sean-  
OCasey](http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portraitLarge/mw07743/Sean-OCasey)

**British Troops searching a Car in  
Dublin, 1920** [http://catalogue.nli.ie/Record/  
vtls000235759](http://catalogue.nli.ie/Record/vtls000235759)

**Black and Tans Search Sinn Fein Man** [http://  
www.theguardian.com/books/2013/dec/20/  
republic-fight-irish-independence-townshend-  
review](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/dec/20/republic-fight-irish-independence-townshend-review)

**Dublin Tenements** [http://www.census.  
nationalarchives.ie/exhibition/dublin/poverty\\_  
health.html](http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/exhibition/dublin/poverty_health.html)